



United States Department of Commerce
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
Southeast Fisheries Science Center
75 Virginia Beach Drive
Miami, FL 33149

Date: August 20, 2013

Dear Permit Holder:

This letter is to inform you about potential changes to the effort data collection methodologies in the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery. The purpose of this action is to maintain NOAA Fisheries ability to monitor and document offshore fishing effort for the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) shrimp fleet through an electronic logbook (ELB) program. Implementation of the current shrimp ELB program through a contract with LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc., has provided accurate estimates of shrimp fishing effort. However, the contract with LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc., will expire on December 31, 2013. Without effective monitoring, the conclusions in the governing biological opinion, as well as the ability to comply with the terms and conditions, would be undermined and the shrimp fishery could be significantly adversely impacted.

The Gulf shrimp fishery is one of the nation's most economically valuable fisheries, and the most valuable fishery in the Gulf. The current ELB program provides data on Gulf shrimp fishing effort that is critical to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) and NOAA Fisheries in performing annual assessments of the status of shrimp stocks. The ELB program is also a key component in the Council's red snapper rebuilding plan because accurate estimates of juvenile red snapper mortality attributable to the shrimp fishery are essential to the rebuilding plan.

Amendment 13 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Shrimp Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico United States Waters (GMFMC 2005) established the requirement for the ELB program. The program is administered by NOAA Fisheries and is a cost effective way to accurately determine the amount and location of effort occurring in the shrimp fishery of the Gulf exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Current regulations require participation in the ELB program, if selected by the Science and Research Director (SRD):

§ 622.51 Recordkeeping and reporting.

(a) Commercial vessel owners and operators--(1) General reporting requirement. The owner or operator of a vessel that fishes for shrimp in the Gulf EEZ or in adjoining state waters, or that lands shrimp in an adjoining state, must provide information for any fishing trip, as requested by the SRD, including, but not limited to, vessel identification, gear, effort, amount of shrimp caught by species, shrimp condition (heads on/heads off), fishing areas and depths, and person to whom sold.

(2) Electronic logbook reporting. The owner or operator of a vessel for which a Federal commercial vessel permit for Gulf shrimp has been issued and who is selected by the SRD must participate in the NMFS-sponsored electronic logbook reporting program as directed by the SRD. In addition, such owner or operator must provide information regarding the size and number of shrimp trawls deployed and the type of bycatch reduction device (BRD) and turtle excluder device used, as directed by the SRD. Compliance with the reporting requirements of this paragraph (a)(2) is required for permit renewal.

Vessels selected to participate must carry data recording devices, which are simple time-stamped global positioning system (GPS) units that record and store a vessel's location at 10-minute time intervals. From these time-stamped locations, vessel speed between points (i.e., stopped, towing, moving between towing points) can be estimated and then evaluated with mathematical algorithms. Thus, effort by location can be calculated for a given fishing trip. Shrimp catch data for the trip are then used to estimate catch-per-unit-effort for the trip at various fishing locations. Shrimp effort estimates for various locations, time periods, or vessels are provided to NOAA Fisheries each trimester (i.e., 4-month time period). Vessels selected for the program must also provide the size and number of shrimp trawls deployed for each set and the type of bycatch reduction device and turtle excluder device used. NOAA Fisheries will not allow renewal of permits for selected vessels that are selected but do not participate in the ELB program.

The NOAA Fisheries' Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) is currently exploring ways to improve and continue the shrimp ELB program. In the process of exploring options for the ELB units, engineers from SEFSC found an off-the-shelf unit that meets the objectives of the current ELB program. The new ELB device has the capability to capture and store vessel position every 10 minutes and transmit those data to agency database servers through a cellular phone connection activated when the vessel is within non-roaming cellular range. This capability reduces handling costs of the current protocol, which now requires a technician to meet returning vessels to remove and program the memory card, and puts the data in the analysts' hands more quickly.

The SEFSC has obtained the new units and has begun programming and testing. Depending upon final implementation of the program by NOAA Fisheries your shrimp vessel may be selected for participation in this new data collection activity. If selected, the permit holder will be sent a new cellular ELB (cELB) at no cost to the permit holder. The permit holder will also receive detailed instructions regarding cELB installation, and cellular account activation. The costs for cELB installation, cellular account activation, and monthly cellular transmission charges will be the responsibility of the permit holder.

Thank you very much for your continued cooperation with the ELB program. Without your cooperation, the collection of this critical information would not be possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bonnie J. Ponwith', written in a cursive style.

Bonnie J. Ponwith, Ph.D.
Director, Southeast Fisheries Science Center